Spreading lesson study in pre-service teacher instruction

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to examine the perceptions of pre-service teachers who used lesson study on a 5-week school-based teaching placement. The paper analyses 12 undergraduate pre-service teachers' perceptions of the way lesson study affected classroom-based teaching of English as a foreign language to preschool and primary school. Design: A qualitative study is carried out from the responses to a semi-structured interview to the pre-service teachers; and written responses to the open-ended question: What are your perceptions of lesson study? Findings: The paper provides empirical insights about the way lesson study reinforced the pre-service teachers' classroom management and lesson planning skills. The case-pupils' responses to the pre-service teachers' questions post-treatment indicated that games and active techniques in the classroom led to high retention of the taught content. Nevertheless, pre-service teachers' evaluations of pupils' learning outcomes require further development. These evaluations often resulted in vague perceptions of overall lesson performance. Limitations: The study provides hints of how case-pupils better learned and how PSTs did the observations and performed. However, the results cannot be generalized. Value: The researchers sustain that the teaching degrees should encourage critical thinking in PSTs' self-evaluations to reduce the focus on standards and expectations. It is believed that if the pressure of designing perfect lessons is removed from the equation; and instead, sensible and realistic lessons are planned, PSTs will be more inclined to learn and respond resourcefully, creatively, and resolutely to classroom situations.

Key-words: lesson study; active learning; pre-service teachers; teacher training

Introduction

Preparing resourceful, reflective, versatile pre-service teachers (PSTs) is the cornerstone of any teaching degree. Becoming an education professional should be thought of as a career-long endeavor rather than the process of obtaining a university qualification (Rock, 2003). Accordingly, teaching degrees should give PSTs the opportunity to assimilate the theory that underpins teaching, while allowing them to actively observe mentors and pupils, reflect, collaborate, and share their visions about teaching approaches and methods as well as pupils' learning (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2013). Ultimately, teaching degrees should go even further, promoting reflective teaching practice by having PSTs look at what they do in the classroom, think about why they do it, and assess its effectiveness and value. As advocated by Loughran (2002), the reflective practice implies crafted practice in which PSTs identify a problem (a curious situation) and are capable of analyze it and even reframe it. PSTs should be qualified to accomplish self-observation and self-evaluation (Dudley, 2011, 2012, 2013; Lewis & Hurd, 2011). For many educators around the world, research-based lessons are the key to analyzing and understanding what actually happens in the classroom. These lessons require professional knowledge to face the complexity of the classroom practice (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Loughran, 2002, 2006, 2016). Research-based lessons are carefully planned to allow PSTs to collaboratively study some aspect of teaching (Lewis & Hurd, 2011, Loughran, 2016). Research-based lessons are a central feature of lesson study, the method examined in this research.

2.   Background to the study

The use of lesson study has been at its peak for approximately a decade. A growing number of institutions and education professionals have started implementing lesson

study in a wide variety of disciplines such as history, physical education, mathematics, and languages. Experts claim that through lesson study both PSTs and pupils improve their learning (Fernandez, Cannon & Chokshi, 2003; Gorman, Mark & Nikula, 2010; Murata, Bofferding, Pothen, Taylor & Wischnia, 2012; Perry & Lewis, 2008).

Lesson study began in the Tokyo Normal School in Japan during the Meiji period in the late 1800s. Since then, it has been a fundamental part of improvements in teaching and the curriculum in Japan. Through their book *The Teaching Gap*, Stigler and Hiebert (1999) introduced the international community to the concept of lesson study, and interest from educators around the world has been growing ever since. Examples of lesson study can be found in countries such as the Philippines, Laos, Indonesia, Thailand, and Cambodia in Asia and Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa in Africa, where lesson study has been successfully applied to mathematics and science lessons (Isoda, Stephens, Ohara, & Miyakawa, 2007; Ono & Ferreira, 2010). In the US, there are more than 400 active lesson study groups (Lewis & Hurd, 2011), and examples of institutions that have embraced lesson study in Europe include the University of Leicester in the UK (Cajkler & Wood, 2014), where lesson study is used to develop new teachers' expertise, and the University of Stavanger in Norway (Munthe, Bjuland & Helgevold, 2016), where PSTs learn through lesson study in areas such as Mathematics, English, Physical Education, and Pedagogy. There are also several examples of the use of lesson study to train EFL teachers in Europe, including in a secondary school in the Czech Republic (Tasker, 2014) and at the University of Stavanger in Norway (Larssen & Drew, 2014, 2015). Both experiences show that lesson study is a successful tool for PSTs to improve their practical skills, although the method requires considerable effort, preparation, and instruction. It can be argued that effective reflective practice is the cornerstone of lesson studies which comprises different actors, being mentors a significant factor in the process. Reflective

practice as Calderhead & Gates (2003) have argued, holds that the reflective PSTs learn and develop through critical enquiry, analysis and self-directed evaluation, a process that can be aided by experienced school mentors. The PSTs can move forward in the experiential learning cycle proposed by Kolb (2014), leading to emancipation and professional autonomy: reflection on prior experiences; to gain full accounts of what actually took place, to make value judgements about what happened, to categorise experience and analyse the experience and to identify learning points to be applied in new situations in the future.

Lesson study, thus, consists of sharing professional knowledge based on the reflective practice of teaching (Schön, 1987; Gipe & Richards, 1992; Norton, 1997, Hankey, 2004). Lesson study does not mean simply producing a lesson. Lesson study is a long-term professional method whereby teams of PSTs or in-service teachers collectively plan, research, and analyze their lesson instruction to determine how pupils learn best based on solid theoretical foundations (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). It encourages professional learning by developing self-reflection and critical thinking through peer collaboration and guided observation of pupils (Armstrong, 2011; Ylonen & Norwich, 2012; Lamb, 2015; Lamb & Aldous, 2016). The authors also agree that lesson study allows teachers to bridge the gap between the national curriculum and the actual lesson. Lesson study adds practical improvements to the pre-established educational curriculum. Lewis and Hurd (2011) also claim that lesson study can be a powerful strategy to improve teacher quality, and they stress its collaborative nature, which is both its best feature and its biggest challenge. Research has examined the effectiveness of lesson study in teacher preparation. Peña-Trapero (2013), for example, reports that lesson study may prove effective because it promotes reflection and critical questioning of personal assumptions about teaching.

Sandoval, Echeita, and Simon (2014) conducted a three-year research project on the potential of lesson study and found that lesson study is a powerful tool for developing professional competencies that encourage inclusion in the classroom.

For the present study, before implementing lesson study in schools, PSTs read about and analyzed several teaching methods. They then had the opportunity to plan lessons for imaginary pupils based on general teaching guidelines and notions described by Cameron (2001) and Richards and Rogers (2014). Following this planning but before applying lesson study in schools, the PSTs reflected on the concept of creating "perfect" or successful lessons. Experience has shown that PSTs tend to evaluate lessons in terms of how successful the lessons are. They use a holistic approach to understand what really happened.

However, according to Schön (1987), PSTs were to be trained in 'the artistry of reflection-in-action' to be able to go beyond overall observations. Schön coined the term 'reflective practicum' as the framework for PSTs' learning by doing with the assistance of professionals as coaches. A three-fold professional coaching sequence was developed 'follow me!', 'joint experimentation' and 'hall of mirrors'. These stages of a learning process gradually increased the experiential learning of the PSTs within a scaffold of knowledge and skill development. Schön (1987) and years later Townsend (2010) coincided in the positive nature of reflective practicum in times in which social demands bring about a change in teachers' mindsets and practices. In this way, PSTs would move away from the perfect lesson utopia to a more realistic approach to teaching. In line with this, Hjorth, Smith, Loi, Iversen, & Skov (2016) propose a framework in which the design theory, in-school practice and peer-to-peer learning constitute a springboard to facilitate and support co-development of new teaching practices.

In the context of the present study, for many years, PSTs have tried to comply with standards and external expectations to teach lessons as fairly as possible taking into account the institution, classroom facilities, learners' level of English, and university requirements, among other factors. Yet, the researchers feel something is missing from PSTs' evaluations of lessons. It is true that developing an overall perception about how well a lesson is working is imperative for deciding whether to continue or to redirect the lesson. Removing standards and expectations, however, may result in PSTs' being motivated by learning in itself. Standards create expectations, and expectations create extrinsic motivation, which very often clashes with intrinsic motivation. By reducing expectations, PSTs are more likely to have intrinsic motivation to learn. Motivational factors are vital to achieve anything of significance (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, negative motivational influences such as fear of failure (e.g., failing the subject or performing poorly in school teaching practice), a sense of helplessness, a lack of confidence, and a feeling that one's success is largely controlled by external factors rather than by oneself almost certainly hinder a person's learning achievements (Howe, 1987; Dweck, 2006). Hence, the PSTs who participated in the study were aware that they could not expect to teach a perfect lesson because it is unrealistic to expect to be able to meet the learning preferences of the whole class. The PSTs had to focus on their pupils, the way they learned, and what they learned (case pupils). The more difficulties PSTs encountered, the better. They thus had to strive to analyze, adapt, and propose solutions (Nottingham, Pedder, & Opfer, 2012). In our view, success refers to the PSTs' capacity to identify difficulties, provide solutions, and learn throughout the process.

3.   Research questions

The purpose of this study was twofold:

1. to determine whether the pedagogical course *Teaching EFL and children's literature* and the lesson study method helped PSTs develop their abilities to teach a foreign language;

2. to describe how PSTs perceived lesson study as a pedagogical strategy for reflective professional teacher development.

The research questions for this study were as follows: (1) How useful was the course to enhance strategies for teaching English? (2) What were the benefits of the teacher training preparation using the lesson study method?

4.   Method

The case study presented in this paper aimed at investigating how PSTs might become competent reflective educators. Thus, the study analyzes 12 undergraduate pre-service teachers' perceptions of the way lesson study has contributed to a more effective teaching practice to preschool and primary school pupils. These 12 PSTs are part of a much larger cohort who will do teaching practices in several schools in the region. For this specific pilot project, only two schools in the area were willing to accept PSTs under the lesson study scope. Their capacity to allocate PSTs was up to 12. Thus, in this way, the 12 PSTs (8 women and 4 men) who participated in the study were the ones who were randomly allocated in these two schools.

The lesson study model was developed and adapted from the Norwegian lesson study process designed by Larssen and Drew (2015), who in turn built on notions described by Dudley (2011, 2012, 2013). This study, however, used a longitudinal type approach to lesson study (lessons implemented with a week gap) rather than the cross-sectional approach (lessons implemented in the same week with a gap of one or two days) used in the Norwegian model. This adapted framework allowed the pre-service teachers gain

perspective regarding what they needed to modify and improve. The PSTs conducted the research lessons in pairs. There was not any conflict of interest as the entire pre-service teachers group (43 in total) had to do teaching practices on a regular basis in several schools in the region.

The pre-service teachers (PSTs) doing lesson study did not teach the same lesson twice in different classes, as stipulated by Lewis and Hurd (2011). Instead, they improved research lesson I, and to avoid repetition, they added content to research lesson II for the same class group.

In the present study, PSTs were given five weeks' experience in schools to observe pupils, identify case pupils, and design two research lessons. Mentors received training to help PSTs apply the lesson study method (Table 1). Mentors and PSTs followed Dudley's lesson study handbook (Dudley, 2011). PSTs taught the lessons in pairs, being one of them delivering the research lesson I (PST1) and the other conducting structured observation of the three case-pupils and their learning (PST2). The process is repeated in the research lesson 2, but the one delivering the lesson is PST2 and the one observing is PST1.

4.1. Study

This study was based on qualitative analysis of the data collected from the lesson study pilot project. The project was implemented in two schools and was conducted by 12 PSTs studying English teaching methodology as their teaching degree specialization. Data for the study came from the following sources:

   a. a semi-structured interview with the PSTs ($N = 12$) during the debriefing (Forum III)

b. written responses ($N = 12$) to the following open-ended question: "What are your perceptions of lesson study?"

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the whole group of PSTs ($N = 12$) during the debriefing (Forum III). The semi-structured interview followed a set of guiding questions to boost responses on the issues raised in an explanatory manner (Dörnyei, 2007; Austin, 2016; Palaiologou, Needham & Male, 2016). The aim was to gather detailed responses right after the experience. Note-taking was used to record the information provided by the PSTs (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

The semi-structured interview consisted of a set of questions that linked theory studied during the course to in-school experiences. The interview encouraged PSTs to reflect upon and discuss their interpretations of the process (Scott & Usher, 1999; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Being systematic when gathering the data was crucial. The two researchers of the present study carried out the interviews together and note-taking was central to recall some critical events that might otherwise have been forgotten. The interviews were not recorded as it was not allowed in the institution at that moment. Prior to the interview, the researcher indicated that participation in the study was voluntary and had no impact on the final grade of the subject. However, a certification of participation in educational innovation was to be given to the PSTs collaborating with the research study.

The PSTs' written responses to the open-ended question (i.e., "What are your perceptions of lesson study?") were gathered from the written reports submitted one week after the teaching practices with lesson study were over. The written reports were uploaded onto the university online platform.

This study followed the main canons of validity and reliability identified by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) by using varied resources and evidence to answer the research

questions- semi-structured interviews, open question post-treatment and class observations of case-pupils-.

4.2. Ethical issues

The legal aspects of research ethics and data protection were carefully respected and the research was authorized by the Head of the Department and the Heads of the two participating schools. The PSTs were also informed that any extra information beside the lesson study project could not be part of the research project. As confidentiality is another important ethical issue, PSTs were informed orally and through a letter to them and the school mentors that their identity was not going to be revealed.

4.3. Limitations of the study

The present study gathers the results of a 5-week teaching practice in only two primary schools following the lesson study method. The number of PSTs was small (*N=12*). As a case study, results cannot be generalized. However, the sample corresponds to two state-subsidized schools and provides hints of how case-pupils better learned and how PSTs did the observations and performed. PSTs' command of the English language was a real challenge as English is still approached as a foreign language in the context of the present study, and PSTs had to struggle to present activities in a more significant way considering that pupils do not see the need to use the target language outside of class.

4.4 Data analysis

For the semi-structured interview, we used inductive analysis (Richards, 2006) to generate codes to group similar issues. The two researchers of the present study compared the notes taken during Forum III and introduced the data into the ATLAS.ti software in which it was classified into initial categories and subcategories until saturation (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, the analysis of the coded data yielded three categories: (1) using lesson

study to improve PSTs' command of classroom language; (2) using lesson study to foster real communication in class; (3) and reinforcing social competencies using games and competitions.

To analyze the written responses to the open-ended question, the researchers followed the same procedure as before (Charmaz, 2006). The two researchers compared the data to elicit chunks of text or entire texts from the written responses to be introduced into Atals.ti V.5.2. In this way, they attempted to ensure that any conclusions were consistent with the data (Silverman, 2011). Analysis of the coded data yielded three more categories of analysis: (1) perceptions as PSTs; (2) perceptions of the pupils' learning and performance; and (3) thoughts on pupils' responses.

5.   Results

The aim of this research was to determine whether the pedagogical course *Teaching EFL and children's literature* and the lesson study method helped PSTs develop their abilities to teach a foreign language; and to describe how PSTs perceived lesson study as a pedagogical strategy for reflective professional teacher development. This section presents the findings of the analysis of the semi-structured interview and the analysis of the written responses to the open question about PSTs' perceptions about lesson study.

5.1.   *Analysis of the semi-structured interview*

In connection with the methodological application of lesson study over a 5-week period by 12 PSTs in their respective school environments, the PSTs' responses to the interview allowed the identification of three central challenges: (1) understanding the importance of having a good command of classroom language, (2) fostering real communication in class, and (3) reinforcing social competencies through the use of games and competitions. Based on the collected data and analysis, we argue that these challenges address relevant

aspects of reflective EFL teacher expertise. The approach of the lesson study intervention forged a focus on the ability to provoke reflection on the teaching practice and knowledge through a theoretical-practical teaching process.

Regarding the first challenge, *understanding the importance of having a good command of classroom language*, most PSTs felt insecure for two main reasons: their own inexperience as teachers and the use of English to conduct a lesson.

> It was very challenging trying to teach specific content in English. I had to prepare the lesson carefully, and that included vocabulary of the lesson, and also classroom vocabulary to be able to even control behaviour. (S2)

> Being capable of managing the class in English is something to be developed and must be taught and rehearsed at university. (S3)

PSTs spent 200 school hours of practice in the first and second years of their university degree as observers with minor teaching responsibilities. Then, in the third year of the degree, they were expected to be in charge of a whole class for 125 hours, or approximately five weeks. Special attention is required to assess the practicalities of using the appropriate language in class. In terms of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, all PSTs had the threshold level of English (B1), but few were at the B2 level. Nevertheless, neither of these levels guarantees accurate use and teaching of English in the classroom (Kirkpatrick, 2007).

> The real challenge was to make myself understood. I found it really hard, especially with young pupils with almost no level of English during the research lesson 1. (S1)

Some PSTs found it hard to explain the tasks to pupils. The pupils got lost if the PSTs gave long explanations. According to Read (2005, 2010), short and clear instructions accompanied by demonstration prove to be effective in an EFL classroom. After revising the research lesson 1, identifying the difficulties and consulting the literature again, most

PSTs indicated that post research lesson discussion and reflection had helped them overcome the language difficulties.

The process the PSTs go through during and after the research lesson 1 evidence the usual lack of connection between the theory and practice from the start as stated by Korthagen & Kessels (1999). It is at this point that lesson study invigorates the teaching practices since error realization encourages discussion, adaptation and reflective teaching. PSTs find a second opportunity in the research lesson 2 to readjust whatever necessary to make the lesson better, more suitable to their pupils.

The second challenge driven from the semi-structured interview is understanding that a foreign language is better learnt if every activity is an opportunity for communication. PSTs have understood that they could benefit from most of the activities to reinforce L2.

> After research lesson 1 we realized that we could have done a lot more had we turned some tasks into communicative opportunities. (S5)

Communicative tasks are a crucial part of language learning and teaching. Despite its importance, for many years, communication, more concretely speaking, has been taught just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues (Chacón, 2005; Singh, 2016). Yet, today's demands clearly indicate that pupils' good command of oral English will ensure their understanding of the social and cultural rules in each communicative circumstance. Understanding the importance of using English communicatively in every situation has become a challenge for our PSTs.

The third challenge is in some way linked to the understanding language teaching as an opportunity to socialize. PSTs, through the design of games and competitions, could understand that not only language learning was fostered. Social competences also were.

> Our 10 year-old pupils seemed to be more engaged in the class if they played a game or if they had to compete with other groups. All pupils were easily integrated in the groups (S1).

Whereas some PSTs might have felt unsure about themselves to control behaviour and regulate participation, most PSTs have taken a step forward in promoting team competitions and game participation as they understood that pupils needed to socialize to be able to speak.

> Learning a language is learning how to interact with others. Games have been funny, noisy but highly educational. By the end of the class, pupils could recall the vocabulary and some said they did not want the lesson to end (S7).

Coinciding with Deesri (2002), games help create interesting communicative opportunities, and motivate students to increase their learning.

5.2. Pre-service teachers' written responses to the following open-ended question: "What are your perceptions of lesson study?"

The pre-service teachers' written responses to the question about their perceptions of lesson study yielded three categories of analysis: (1) perceptions as PSTs; (2) perceptions of the pupils' learning and performance; (3) thoughts on pupils' responses.

In terms of *perceptions as PSTs*, most pre-service teachers reported that observing the pupils and sharing ideas for two weeks before teaching the research lessons greatly helped them anticipate problems. In line with Cohen (2011), some said that the importance of observations is the self-confidence gained to be in charge of the class group.

> My partner and I observed the pupils and identified the case pupils in the class. They were very different and learned differently. By observing them, we were able to plan the lessons, choosing activities and roles we knew would be suitable for the case pupils and the class. (S1)

> What I found most useful was the opportunity to speak to my partner about the pupils and the teaching methods every day for two weeks. I think it was not so difficult to plan the first lesson because we knew the pupils already. (S8)

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I liked the experience because I had overcome my fears of managing a whole class. (S3)

Some PSTs discovered a new dimension of their teaching practice by reinforcing their skills in classroom management while improving their language skills.

> Through lesson study, I have learned to control pupils and classroom situations in English. (S5)

> I wanted to participate in the project because I needed to practice how to teach English. I still need to improve quite a lot. (S3)

Some PSTs highlighted the value of the teaching sequence proposed during the course, which consisted of dividing the lesson into three sections. First, pre-teaching introduced the key vocabulary and grammar in a fun way to get the pupils' attention and introduce content that would be helpful later in the lesson. Next, the actual teaching presented the main content using stories, book reading, and similar techniques. Finally, post-teaching consisted of activities carefully chosen to get feedback on how much pupils had learned or assimilated. Most PSTs indicated that lesson study let them learn from their mistakes in their approach to activities and planning.

> I made some mistakes in the first lesson by skipping some oral practice in the pre-teaching, so pupils forgot some new vocabulary during the actual teaching. It was an interactive short story, and it was important for them to identify the words to respond to my questions. In the second lesson, my partner placed greater emphasis on the new vocabulary during the pre-teaching by making the pupils play a repetition game. Pupils were then able to follow the rest of the story better. (S11)

> After planning and getting everything ready, I had to change some activities and the way I introduced them. The planning was wrong, and the last-minute changes were right. (S1)

> I will use the teaching sequence for all subjects when I become a teacher. (S6)

Analysing the written responses to the open question, the researchers observe a curious process of realization between lessons 1 and 2. Most PSTs found weaknesses in their approach to lesson 1 in terms of language restrains, classroom management, teaching techniques, behavior and learning styles. All these brought about the need to find theoretical foundations to redirect the course of the lesson in the second attempt. Research-supported lessons is undoubtedly another added value during the teaching practice (Orlick, 1981; Bay-Hinitz, Peterson & Quilitch, 1994). Peer collaboration is also a cornerstone in the attempt to revise and improve a lesson as clearly advocated by Armstrong, (2011); Ylonen & Norwich, (2012); Lamb, (2015); Lamb & Aldous, (2016). Some PSTs, reflected upon how well classroom practice compliments the theory studied in the subject *Teaching ESL and children's literature*. For instance, PSTs understood that although pupils could grasp meaning from the verbal explanations, it was definitely better to demonstrate rather than explain (Ellis; Basturkmen & Loewen, 2001; Read, 2005, 2010; Richards & Rogers, 2014). Some PSTs reflected on language use and language effectiveness after the research lesson 1. Although they had assimilated the theory, it was not until the classroom practice when realization and learning took place. PSTs could prove that short bursts of speech were most effective, and the use of direct questions instead of wh-questions or indirect questions received an immediate response from pupils. All the PSTs highlighted the importance of peer observations to improve the language used in class. Peer observation helped them plan and rehearse the language for the research lesson 2.

PSTs said they realized they had to be consistent with language because the pupils had a creative but limited use of language resources. In addition, PSTs confirmed Harmer's claim of contextualized learning as they learnt that the gist of the lessons was to recreate a real situation within the classroom and create the need for communication (Harmer,

2008). Some PSTs recreated familiar situations for the pupils to interact (a greengrocer's, a snack bar, and a tourist information office).

Some PSTs indicated that they felt confident with their mentors and that their willingness and guidance enormously contributed to their practice.

> Our mentor was really helpful and gave us ideas for our first lesson. (S2)
>
> The classroom mentor was nice and commented on some things to improve after the lessons. She stayed in class during both lessons. (S9)

Coinciding with Mena, Hennissen & Loughran (2017) mentors' directive approach greatly built on PSTs' performance.

The second category of analysis was *perceptions of the pupils' attitude and performance*. PSTs agreed that most pupils were highly motivated in the lessons. They believed that pupils learned more and better when teachers had identified the objectives and had a clear plan to follow.

> During both lessons, our pupils were motivated. Most paid enough attention and participated in the activities. (S4)
>
> Pupils learn through repetition and routines. That is why we should plan the activities carefully to give them time to assimilate the vocabulary. (S10)

An added value to their planning was that most case pupils actively participated in social interactions using English. As some PSTs recalled, some activities represented everyday life events (shopping, asking directions) which made the lessons more significant. The use of games was highly beneficial to learning, especially if those games were kinesthetic.

> In our planning, we used some games (a competition and a guessing game) and pupils had a lot of fun. They wanted to carry on with the lesson for another hour! (S9)
>
> Our pupils were more engaged if they had to move and do something. (S12)

The PSTs were aware that they were not expected to plan perfectly. Instead, they were expected to pay special attention to pupils' learning. As some of the pre-service teachers' comments showed, pupils had fun and demonstrated what they had learned. It would have been helpful if the PSTs had been more specific, however, because their responses did not specify what pupils learned exactly and how they did it. General comments about teaching techniques and pupils' learning must be backed up with sound examples from real school-based teaching practice.

Finally, the third category, *pre-service teachers' thoughts on case pupils' responses*, yielded some interesting insights. All pupils were engaged during the parts of the lessons where game-based activities such as competitions, guessing games, and repetition games were used. Some PSTs concluded that during the post-teaching, pupils had retained the vocabulary and expressions learned during games in the previous stages of the lesson (i.e., pre-teaching and actual teaching).

> Pupils loved playing games, and I think it's beneficial if we are consistent with the language we want them to learn. In the post-teaching, most pupils learned the new words after playing the game. (S7)
>
> […] case pupils had memorized the key words from the lesson. (S5)

A recurrent response was that pupils enjoyed group activities with other classmates. They appeared to enjoy participating in activities with their friends. Most pupils also said they liked singing a lot. PSTs used songs to move between activities and maintain good behavior when moving on to another task. The songs also reinforced language structures and pronunciation.

In spite of the dynamic lessons planned by the PSTs, however, a small number of primary school pupils aged 6–8 years old also reported that they preferred to do worksheets in the English class. The small number of responses hinted at pupils' need to go back to what was familiar to them. Some other pupils asked the PSTs to do more activities in the open

air. When asked about their learning, most pupils found it difficult to be accurate, but they were able to articulate what they found most engaging or fun. Only a few older pupils could list words they had learned and some complete expressions practiced in the lessons. Some PSTs indicated that the interviews with the preschool pupils yielded insufficient information. This is usually the case because preschool pupils are not yet cognitively ready to provide satisfactory verbal answers on their learning.

6.   Conclusions

PSTs successfully implemented the lesson study method during a teaching placement and reported that the method was highly beneficial for themselves as future practitioners. They learned to anticipate problems through direct observation of particular case pupils before conducting their research lessons. They reinforced classroom management skills while improving their ability to teach in English. The pupils' post-treatment responses to the PSTs' questions confirmed that using games and active techniques in the classroom was popular among primary school pupils, who retained the taught content well. The preschool pupils provided little information as to what they had learned, but their participation in the activities revealed that the pupils could follow the tasks. Conversely, the researchers of the present study have learned that PSTs should develop a more critical view of the context where they teach. PSTs need to improve their evaluations of pupils' learning. Their evaluation skills will need reinforcing at university to move from overall perceptions of satisfaction toward precise information about what and how pupils learn. In addition, the researchers sustain that the teaching degrees should encourage critical thinking in PSTs' self-evaluations to reduce the focus on standards and expectations. It is believed that if the pressure of designing perfect lessons is removed from the equation; and instead, sensible and realistic lessons are planned, PSTs will be more inclined to learn

and respond resourcefully, creatively, and resolutely to classroom situations. Adding a teaching methodology module to teaching degrees would offer PSTs a chance to learn new methods to apply during teaching placements. One such method is classroom-based research through lesson study. The results of the implementation of lesson study imply that classroom-based learning and lesson study can help train innovative, sensitive professionals capable of responding to today's educational demands. Future research will also analyze the school mentors' assessment, providing a triangulation study to validate the findings and conclusions presented herein.

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